

# Virginia Veterans News

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Serving Virginia's Veterans Since 1942

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**From the Commissioner's Desk . . .** The General Assembly has adjourned and, thanks to the willingness of our state legislators to support proposals by Governor Warner and Board of Veterans Services member Delegate Kirk Cox, new veterans service representatives will begin working in DVS benefits offices in July. To support this worthy endeavor, Governor Warner requested additional funds for training in the one-day, reconvened session, which the General Assembly approved. This is a good first step in rebuilding a strong program with well-trained staff . . . a program designed to help veterans and their survivors. Many thanks to all the veterans who contacted their state representatives to request support of veterans programs and services in Virginia during the General Assembly session. Their concern and activism went a long way to achieve positive results.



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## **State Veterans Care Centers**

Thunder was the sound as 425 *Run for the Wall* motorcyclists made a stop at the Virginia Veterans Care Center on May 26. The bikers were traveling to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to participate in the *Rolling Thunder* parade on May 27 in Washington, D.C. Riders had dinner and shared their stories with VVCC residents.

The process of transferring property from the federal government to the Commonwealth for the construction of the Sitter-Barfoot Care Center in Richmond is near completion, with construction to begin in the near future.

## **State Veterans Cemeteries**

There were 116 burials at the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery for the period January 1 – March 31, 2005; the Virginia Veterans Cemetery had 43 burials for the same period. The Blue Star Memorial Byway dedication ceremony was held at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery on May 5. Commissioner Mangis spoke at the event, which was attended by approximately 100 guests. The memorial is part of a national program of the Federated Garden Clubs of America. Memorial Day ceremonies also were held at both cemeteries.

## **State Approving Agency**

The State Approving Agency reviews and approves educational courses and programs for veterans that are offered at qualified educational institutions in Virginia. Programs range from college and university curricula, to certificate and apprenticeship programs at community colleges, trade and technical schools. For information on VA educational benefits, call toll-free (888) 442-4551.

## **DVS to Hold Supermarkets of Veterans Benefits**

In addition to the Supermarket held in South Boston on April 21, DVS will hold three other Supermarkets this year – all events will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**June 23** – Holiday Inn Hotel, Norton

**August 24** – Wytheville Community Center

**October 20** – Rappahannock Community College, Warsaw Campus

For more information on the Supermarkets, contact Steve Combs at [steven.combs@dvs.virginia.gov](mailto:steven.combs@dvs.virginia.gov) or (804) 786-0286.

## **Virginia Veterans Claims**

For the third quarter (January – March 2005) of State Fiscal Year 2005, DVS reported:

- ★ 1,994 decisions received
- ★ 1,388 claims granted, a 69.61% grant rate
- ★ \$5,393,661 in retroactive claims for 288 veterans
- ★ 18 large awards of over \$50,000

## **Additional Veterans Service Representatives**

DVS benefits offices across the state soon will be staffed with an additional six Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs). This represents a 27% increase over 2004 VSR staffing levels. The VSRs will receive classroom and on-the-job training in preparation for their new responsibilities. Also as a result of the 2005 General Assembly action, all VSRs will travel to itinerate service points at least one day per week.

## **Hire Veterans First Month and Veterans Hiring Preference in State and Local Government**

On March 1, 2005, Governor Mark Warner issued a proclamation recognizing March 2005 as *Hire Veterans First Month in the Commonwealth* to increase awareness among employers of the unique job skills and work ethic possessed by Virginia's military veterans. In his statement, Governor Warner said "we owe a great debt to those who have stepped forward to serve our nation in our active-duty military, the Reserves and the Virginia National Guard. These men and women are disciplined,

hard-working and possess the commitment and skills prized by the business community.”

In addition, House Bill 2428 passed by the 2005 General Assembly, requires the state in its employment selection practices to give additional consideration to veterans who have a service-connected disability rating fixed by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The legislation also requires local governing bodies to give a preference to veterans in their employment policies and practices.

### **Helmets to Hardhats Program**

On May 27, 2005, Governor Mark Warner issued a resolution supporting the Helmets to Hardhats program. This national initiative connects National Guard, Reserves and transitioning active duty military with apprenticeships and careers in the building and construction trades. The program matches an individual's military experience with a specific building trade skill set to allow for direct entry into an affiliated construction union's apprenticeship program. The program is co-sponsored by 15 national building and trade organizations and their employee associations, representing about 82,000 contractors. For more information visit [www.helmetstohardhats.org](http://www.helmetstohardhats.org) or call (866) 741-6210.

### **State Variances in VA Disability Compensation**

On May 19, 2005, the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Inspector General (IG) released a report on its Review of State Variances in VA Disability Compensation Payments. The report found a 50-state average for veterans receiving compensation of 10.2%, with the Virginia average at 10.8%. DVS hopes to improve on that figure as newly trained Veterans Service Representatives come on board. To view the full report, go to [www1.va.gov/opa/ig/](http://www1.va.gov/opa/ig/). As a result of the IG's findings, the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission was established by Congress to review benefits going to disabled veterans and the survivors of deceased veterans. To provide public comment to the Commission, contact Ray Wilburn at [vetscommission@va.gov](mailto:vetscommission@va.gov) or (202) 273-7509.

### **Small-Business Development Assistance**

Veterans seeking to establish or expand their own businesses have assistance programs they can turn to for guidance. The National Veterans Business Development Corporation is a non-profit organization that provides business advice and financial assistance to veterans (866-283-8267, toll free or [www.veteranscorp.org](http://www.veteranscorp.org)). The VA's Center for Veterans Enterprise helps make it easier for veterans to establish and expand their businesses (toll free, 866-584-2344 or [www.vetbiz.va.gov](http://www.vetbiz.va.gov)). The Small Business Administration (SBA) provides the assistance of Veterans Business Development Officers (in Virginia

contact Leroy Harris at (540) 295-3759 or [leroy.harris@sba.gov](mailto:leroy.harris@sba.gov)). The SBA also partners with the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) (toll free, 800-634-0245 or [www.score.org](http://www.score.org)), and local Chambers of Commerce and Small Business Development Centers to provide entrepreneurial advice to veterans.

### **Joint Leadership Council**

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) met on February 23 and May 11, 2005. Governor Warner's Chief of Staff, Bill Leighty, was on hand at the February meeting to present a Certificate of Recognition declaring March 2005 as *Hire Veterans First Month in the Commonwealth*. The JLC also updated its Constitution and Bylaws and received a briefing on veterans legislation passed by the 2005 General Assembly. At the May meeting, the JLC received a presentation on Homeless and Disabled Veterans and a report on In-state Tuition. The JLC also developed its preliminary 2006 legislative agenda to be voted on at the next meeting of the Council, which is scheduled for July 13 at 11:00 a.m. in Richmond.

### **Board of Veterans Services**

The Board of Veterans Services met on March 28, 2005. At the meeting, the Board received a briefing on 2005 veterans legislation and established its 2006 legislative goals and timeline. The Board also developed objectives for the Strategic Planning Subcommittee, which include:

- Review the impact of the 2005 veterans legislation and budget amendments;
- Assess the adequacy of DVS budget resources in relation to its agency mission;
- Develop a plan for meeting agency objectives;
- Obtain input from the Board's standing subcommittees; and
- Present prioritized findings and recommendations to DVS

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for June 27, at 11 a.m. at American Legion Post 176, 6520 Amherst Avenue in Springfield.

### **Veterans Services Foundation**

The Veterans Service Foundation Board of Trustees met on March 9, 2005. The Trustees received an update on the Foundation's IRS application for 501(c)(3) status, as well as a briefing on 2005 veterans legislation and budget amendments. The Trustees also reviewed draft procedures for handling donations. The Foundation meeting scheduled for June 8, 2005, was postponed and will be rescheduled.